Give land back to the Iowa River
Before the Iowa River takes back Parkview Terrace — yet again

Marc Linder  Guest Opinion

A preliminary historical sketch of how the Normandy neighborhood came to be developed in Iowa City by a lack of understanding of the flood history of the Iowa River and the amount of control possessed by the Coralville Dam. Seeking to avoid being "charged with a culpable lack of foresight" if we did not call to your attention that certain hazards yet remain, the commission emphasized that the city's growth and "the urge to use vacant land of close proximity to the university makes the old problem a critical one for solution in the near future." (A preliminary historical sketch of how the Normandy neighborhood came to be developed in Iowa City by a lack of understanding of the flood history of the Iowa River and the amount of control possessed by the Coralville Dam.

Not until the elections of 1966 did the city annex the land, which had been part of unincorporated Johnson County (the motivation for this annexation, like that for the purchase of the land on the town's outskirts, presumably having been, having been the prospect of development.

Then in January 1966, Beck sold the land to Leonard Kaplan, an owner of movie theaters in Eastern Iowa, who in turn sold it to a group including himself, Louis Shulman, a well-known local lawyer; Sam Robinson, secretary-treasurer of a loan company; and Allen Tester, a UI professor of geology. And a long-time State Geologist H. Garland-Hensley was also a member. Other members included Charles Barker, Richard Fiedlersen, James Pearson and Sam Whiting.

By 1968-69, as the Coralville Dam was nearing completion, this group sought the City Council's approval of the subdivision it wanted to develop. But on Oct. 7, 1968, the Iowa City Planning and Zoning Commission adopted a resolution on the zoning of floodplain areas that underscored how flooding would lead to the possible loss of life and property, pollution of waters and hazards caused by broken sewer, waste water supply and electrical power lines. Because such a disaster would require "public and private agencies ... to rescue and retrieve life and property and the economic loss must be shared by many people not responsible, and public funds must be expended to repair, restore or rehabilitate streets, sewers and bridges," the commission recommended that the council restrict land uses in a "Special Flood Plain Zone.

Six days later, the commission explained to the mayor and City Council that such land use was causing it "considerable anxiety." The commission wrote that the council was being asked to consider a change of zoning of an area adjacent to the Iowa River that will be flooded in the future. The commission pointed out that flooding was a "very old" problem and not one whose new dam could not eliminate completely: "(The) engineering data show that certain conditions of natural runoff in the drainage basin will produce floods beyond the capacity and control of the reservoir."